

The MAG paper on Personnel Management provides the EAG an incentive to assess the personnel system that was installed when the Personnel Approaches Study Group, comprised of inter-Directorate representation, prepared a set of recommendations that were adopted in early 1974 by the Management Committee. After the new system had been underway a year, the Office of Personnel surveyed the Career Services to collect their own assessment of how far implementation had gone. This was reported to the employees in a Bulletin. The next step in evaluation was to survey the employees as to how they perceived implementation; this was done in the summer of 1976. An Employee Notice on the results is being prepared for dissemination. Thus, the system has been installed and we are establishing means to collect feedback both from management and from the employees.

From the feedback, is it reasonable to conclude that the personnel system is in trouble? No! In response to the question, "Do you feel the Agency has made improvements in personnel management methods and operations in the past 2 years?", the responses were Yes - 41 percent, No - 21 percent, and Undecided - 35 percent. Nearly twice as many said Yes as said No while a large group was taking a wait-and-see attitude. The MAG paper, which "chooses to be blunt," states "We do not need a lot of elaborate new systems. We need to use those we have or discard them." Accordingly the tone of the MAG paper, though provocative, is not revolutionary.

Where the MAG paper seeks to provoke, it draws on employee responses to the survey to document its positions. It suffers from a lack of perspective, however. What is the pattern of response we would expect? Since we only have the one survey, how can we tell if the response is typical, atypical, or signaling a worsening or improving situation? Clearly, we can tell more after the next survey. But we do have one additional reference point and that is the standardization of a number of the questions with a Civil Service questionnaire used in a large number of other agencies. This gives us a basis for comparison with the rest of government. When this is done, the responses of Agency employees show a favorable pattern that indicates a comparatively healthy personnel system. Even where the MAG paper in paragraph 24 makes much of the fact that 35 percent of the employees judge the promotion system as unfair (the actual question was "Do you think promotions are given fairly in your Career Service?") the comparison with the CSC responses indicates that the Agency's response was slightly more favorable than the average response in Federal agencies. There is a problem here, but one which is shared throughout government.

Distortions

The MAG paper, which draws heavily on the work of OP in the surveys and in the original ~~EAG~~^{OP} paper of 18 October, does not strengthen its case or its credibility when it distorts the OP position. In the original EAG paper, OP stated that it was sharing the results of the employee survey even though the OP comments did not represent the final product of a full staff study and there had been little time to process and analyze the survey results. The MAG comments ignored this statement and treated the OP comments as if they were ~~the~~ "conclusions." Worse, in paragraph 2 of the MAG ~~paper~~^{paper}, a "principle problem" is ~~stated~~ castigated which was not so identified by OP and allusion was made to Employee Bulletins that "simply defend and explain current practices" whereas the OP statement was that "the employees need to understand the importance of their own assumption of initiative.. Perhaps there is need for an Employee Bulletin on the subject...."

Another distortion occurs in paragraph 10 where the concept of ~~senior staff training for~~ a training program for senior staff officers is confused with the responsibility of the directorates for providing "orientation."

A serious distortion occurs in paragraph 24 where it is asserted ~~in the MAG~~ that "it is precisely this capricious and arbitrary treatment, which depends largely on the attitudes of individual supervisors, that lead 35 percent of our employees to judge the promotion system as unfair." Do we know the reason? ~~On what~~^{What} evidence? But if MAG believes this, shouldn't the EAG question why MAG wishes to make the supervisor the primary means of addressing the problem of career development (para. 4)?
Harmful Suggestion

One MAG suggestion, in paragraph 14, could actually be very harmful to the interests of employees. That is the suggestion that the fitness report report the ranking of the employee in comparative evaluation. This is not appropriate in an ~~objective~~ appraisal of an employee's performance. It can be damaging when the ranking is made part of the permanent record and might influence future assessments of performance. (The Halo or ~~Tarnish~~ Tarnish effects)

~~OP~~ Major Change of Policy

The suggestion in paragraph 4 that supervisors making fitness reports on all employees with fewer than 15 years service make explicit reference to possible future jobs and possible training opportunities amounts to a major reversal of roles in comparative evaluations. We question that the supervisor is in position to make such observations. The multiple inputs from a Board or Panel may actually broaden the identification of such jobs and training opportunities and reduces the impact a biased supervisor may make. We believe greater emphasis should be placed on the assessment function of Boards and Panels.

Things Tried Before

It is understandable, if the MAG is not knowledgeable in personnel matters, that some suggestions are made without recognition that they have been attempted previously. Of this nature are the suggestion that we attempt to work out agreement with the CSC to obtain CSC status for at least some of our employees (para. 15), the suggestion that we revert to ~~single~~ ^{double} step promotion for junior professions (para. 21, - this was studied by the Management Committee about a year ago), and the suggestion that we establish substantial quotas for rotation~~x~~ (para. 7, -when tried many years ago, it was found to defy the concept of the best ~~man for the~~ person for the job).

Critical Assumptions

In the MAG paper, it is made explicit that rotation is good and that flexibility is desirable (paras. 4, 6, and 7). Further, such flexibility is to be developed by rotating people into dissimilar jobs. In the paper prepared for the DDCI on rotation, the Office of Personnel makes the point that there are many different kinds of rotation and different purposes for rotations, some of which make excellent sense from the viewpoint of the Agency and the employee, some of which do not. These need to be sorted out before one can come to grips with how much rotation~~x~~, and for whom, is good.

In paragraph # 12, MAG states that "low potential should be the single most important criterion for judging employees in their first several years on board." This comes as too sweeping an assumption. There are many categories of employee, who are hired for qualifications to fill an immediate job, who would not meaningfully be assessed under this criterion. We agree that the assessment of employees in the ~~trial~~ trial period should include assessment of potential, to the extent that is relevant to the decision to retain. We also note that some forms of potential are difficult to evaluate until the appropriate forms of training and experience have ~~been~~ occurred. Such evaluation must be a continuing responsibility of the Career Boards and Panels.

Items Suggested by MAG and Addressed Already by OP

In para. 16, MAG urges a selective promotion policy, which is the aim of the new draft regulation on promotion prepared by OP.

~~In para. 23, MAG urges more extensive use of "bonus programs,"~~
In para. 31, MAG stresses the role of supervisors in trial period followup. The OP paper on initial assignment also stresses this and would rate supervisors on this function. OP would also restore independent followup interviewing to uncover situations which might arise from poor supervision or other ~~causes arising from circumstances~~ ~~office-related~~ office-related circumstances.

Ambiguous Recommendation

In para. 17, it is recommended that "every effort should be made to reduce the number of strictly managerial jobs....and thus to increase the number of non-managerial slots at the higher levels." It is not specified by whom this effort should be made, which is the essence of the matter. Further, it is assumed~~x~~ that slots freed up from managerial jobs would remain available for non-managerial jobs; this need not follow. Finally, to cap the ambiguity, the next paragraph (18) expresses reservations ~~about~~ reserving senior slots for specialists. For whom are the larger number of non-managerial slots in para. 17 intended?

Allegations

In paragraph 20, almost as a throwaway statement, it is ~~assumed that~~ implied that individuals are given misleading titles and false job descriptions to justify promotions. /Such allegations, ~~if documented~~, can lead to correction of any such abuses.

In para. 24, it is asserted that capricious and arbitrary treatment leads 35 percent of our employees to judge the promotion system as unfair. "Capricious and arbitrary treatment" is basis for management correction; this wording is quite heavy.

Surprising

The position of para. 19 that we don't need better slots for specialists because we can keep them ~~anyway~~ seems to do violence to the concept of relating pay to the value of the individual to the organization. Instead it substitutes a distinctly ~~exploit~~ exploitative aspect.

Matters for Other Offices

Paragraphs 25-30 relate to EEO matters and Paragraph 38 to Training. It should be noted that the employees seem to give training a higher vote of confidence in their survey responses than do the MAG .

Suggestions of Questionable Practicality

Paragraph 8 suggests a separate board for those on rotation. This would separate the responsibility for promotions and future assignments from the board which established career objectives for the rotation in the first place and would diminish the comparative basis for evaluation by separating the rotatees from the non-rotatees.

Paragraph 11 suggests that each member of the EAG nominate candidates for each key position. As presented, this could easily become a voting system if the members nominate from other Directorates. Whether this is good or not depends on the objective of the EAG's consideration of candidates for key positions. If the objective is to assure that qualified candidates from throughout the Agency are considered, then it should be sufficient to give each EAG member the opportunity to submit a candidate. The procedure by which the EAG or the DDCI decides on the nominee is a matter for the EAG and the DDCI to decide.

Concepts presented in the MAG paper that need more adequate staffing

Paragraph 36 urges peer rating. The DDA is now preparing a paper on the RCA system, as he mentioned at the EAG meeting on 21 Dec.

Paragraph 37 urges an Office of Personnel Policy, with a wideranging collection of career management, staff, and evaluative functions. An initial reaction is that this is a further fragmentation of personnel functions. The OP paper for the EAG meeting of 20 Oct highlighted the possible need to address the manpower control function through a manpower resources committee at the policy-making level. It is not clear that an additional or ~~xxx~~ fragmented staff is the answer to this problem.